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# Modern Philology

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## DANTE'S "SECOND LOVE"

In the story of the *Vita Nuova*, Beatrice's death left Dante morally and physically prostrated. His friend Cino da Pistoia remonstrated. Such suicidal grief, sinfully rebellious, must debar him forever from the "blessed joy which her name signified."<sup>1</sup> Let Dante therefore cease to rebel against God's will; let him take comfort in hope.

Strip thee of these habiliments of woe,  
As very Reason doth importune thee:  
Of grief men die, yielding them to despair.  
How then might'st see again the visage fair  
If thee, thus desperate, death overtake?  
Prithee, for God's sake,  
Cast off this heavy burden from thy heart;  
Lest it a traitor's part  
Play to thy soul, which hopeth on God's stair  
To see her welcome thee with arms outspread.  
With that hope please thee to be comforted.<sup>2</sup>

Dante was pleased to be comforted, but—with another lady. Later, disillusioned and remorseful, he came to find peace in Cino's way.

<sup>1</sup> "La beata giola come chiamava il nome." Canzone—*Avegna ch'io non aggio più per tempo*. Ed. A. J. Butler, *Forerunners of Dante*, Oxford, 1910, p. 136. Cf. *Vita Nuova*, II, 6-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 46-53.

Spogliatevi di questa veste grama,  
Da che voi siete per ragion richiesto:  
Chè l'omo per dolor muore e dispera.  
Come vedrete poi la bella ciera  
Se v'accogliesse morte in disperanza?  
Da sì greve pesanza  
Traete il vostro core omai, per Dio;  
Che non sia così rio  
Ver l'alma vostra, che ancora ispera  
Vederla in cielo, star nelle sue braccia;  
Dunque di speme confortarvi piaccia.

It is not an unfamiliar story. There is also something not unfamiliar in Dante's insistence that the other lady was "gentle, beautiful, young, and sage,"<sup>1</sup> that indeed she first attracted by reminding him of his old love,<sup>2</sup> so that in the new were "vestiges of the antique flame." It is but human to plead extenuating circumstances. The reader smiles, and—with Beatrice—forgives.

But many readers find it hard to forgive Dante's calm assertion in the *Convivio* that by this other lady, his "second love," he only meant Philosophy. If, as he says,<sup>3</sup> "not passion but virtue" had really moved him to sing of her, why have called his desire of her "culpable"?<sup>4</sup> Why have shed bitter tears for shame of it? If the *Donna Pietosa* was just Philosophy, how have denounced her as an "adversary of reason,"<sup>5</sup> and in the name of Virtue have renounced her? Not for being a pagan: the philosophy of the *Convivio* is orthodox Christian-Aristotelian. If common-sense suggests that he simply forgot his dead lady in study, the *Convivio* emphatically replies: "I believe, affirm, and am certain that I shall pass from this to another and better life, where that glorified Lady liveth, of whom was my soul enamored."<sup>6</sup>

Is Dante then just fooling us? Critics have said so—Signor Antonio Santi, for instance, recently.<sup>7</sup> According to Santi, Dante is concerned to explain away not so much his "second love," namely, for the *Donna Pietosa*, as what we may term his third love, namely, for *la Pietra*, so called. In fact, however, the *Convivio*, as far as it goes, does nothing of the kind. It is the *Donna Pietosa*, not *la Pietra*, who is identified with Philosophy. How Dante, had he continued the *Convivio*, would have "moralized" the *canzoni* relating to *la Pietra* is matter of conjecture; but Santi's allegation of disingenuous trickery on Dante's part in leaving the *Convivio* unfinished is gratuitous. The symbolic logic of the *Convivio*, as it stands, provides for *la Pietra* in a way verified, as I shall attempt to show, by the argument of the *Commedia*. Meanwhile, let us consider the prior issue of the Second Love, or *Donna Pietosa*, as presented in the *Vita Nuova* and *Convivio*.

<sup>1</sup> *V.N.*, xxxix, 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Conv.*, I, ii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, xl, 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxvii, 1-6.

<sup>5</sup> *V.N.*, xl, 14-15.

<sup>6</sup> *Conv.*, II, ix, 132-36.

<sup>7</sup> "Il ravvedimento di Dante e l'inganno del *Convivio*," *Giornale dantesco*, July-August, September-October, 1914.

In both works, certain poems, purporting to record actual experience, are brought together and interpreted from the vantage-ground of retrospect. The interpreter views the recorded experience as a whole, knows its outcome of spiritual regeneration—"new life" sustained by Wisdom. And now he would share his crumbs from the "banquet" of that "food of Angels." Every happening on the way to this fortunate outcome now looks providential, however dubious at first.

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will.

For Dante, Love was that divinity. Obedient to Love's inspiration, often enigmatic, he had come by successive trial and failure to a final success, the test of which was inward peace; as the proof of previous failure had been inward unrest. His service of the *Donne dello Schermo* in Beatrice's lifetime, and of the *Donna Pietosa* after Beatrice's death had indeed been at noble Love's bidding, and so of virtuous intent; yet of the insufficiency of these loves each ensuing "battle of thoughts" had been proof. Service of Beatrice on earth or in heaven had alone brought peace. And peace, stilling of desire, is the one and final object of all desire.<sup>1</sup>

So subtly, but truly, in the retrospect he can declare Beatrice from first to last the one real object of his desire.

I mind me not  
That ever I estranged myself from thee,  
Nor have I therefore conscience that doth prick.<sup>2</sup>

Before this declaration, to be sure, he has drunken of Lethe; but Lethe washes away, not the deed, but the sin in the deed. Blindfold, he had all along been groping for her in whom his desire might be stilled. If in his infirmity he had grasped at others in the way, they had been but mistaken identities,

false images of good  
The which no promise can fulfil entire.<sup>3</sup>

Now his eyes are unbandaged. He knows his true lady. Detaining him from her, these other loves had been "culpable"; yet in fact Providence had brought him by way of them to her; and for Providence, the end justifies the means. He had been weak; but Beatrice

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Epist.*, X, 472-74.

<sup>2</sup> *Purg.*, xxxiii, 91-93.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, xxx, 131-32.

might say, as God to Paul: "Sufficit tibi gratia mea: nam virtus in infirmitate perficitur."

Now if by grace his very infirmity had been seed of good, why might not the voice of his infirmity, his song of false love, show inspired intimation of his predestined true love? So he looks, and finds there oracular ambiguities, coincidences big with fate. That "salute di Beatrice," his first blessedness shows also as his last; for *salute* means "salvation" as well as "salutation"; and the root of the name "Beatrice" is that of "Beatitude," the Christian's reward. And truly "nomina sunt consequentia rerum";<sup>1</sup> for as the root of her attendant Nine is Three, so must Beatrice herself be rooted in the Trinity. Singing of the Lady Joan preceding Beatrice, had he not unwittingly implied that other John who had preceded the "True Light"? Had he not reason also, like St. Paul, to "glory in an abundance of visions" to guide him?

Is Dante serious? Well, if we are to go on calling him a mystic, we should remember that the word means something—meant more yet in the thirteenth century. Dante certainly believed that Virgil had unwittingly announced the Messiah, and had come—unhappily too late for his own profit—to know it.<sup>2</sup> If Virgil in his song might build better than he knew, why not Dante? And why not to Dante the more blessed grace of realizing in time his own at first unapprehended inspiration, of playing the Daniel to his own Nebuchadnezzar's dream?

But even if prophecy were "read into" his songs by Dante for literary effect, the things prophesied were real for him. The *Donna Pietosa* became for him Philosophy, because through her he achieved Philosophy. Consider the situation.

Beatrice was in heaven; Dante disconsolate with life; the accepted consolation of the *Donna Pietosa* reconciled him with life—saved him from the sin of moral and perhaps physical suicide which Cino warned him against, and led him back to his appointed duty, fulfilling which he might earn that merit through which, grace given, salvation was to be won and Beatrice's salutation in heaven. So by the inscrutable decree of Providence the rival of Beatrice is transformed into her ally.

<sup>1</sup> *V. N.*, xlii, 20-21.

<sup>2</sup> *Purg.*, xxii, 67-69.

Now to be with Beatrice in heaven would be to share her blessedness, communion with God.<sup>1</sup> That "blessed joy, which," as Cino had said, "her name signified," is in effect the joy of the blest.<sup>2</sup> Beatrice in glory, "la viva Beatrice beata," becomes then no arbitrary, but a *real*, symbol of heavenly blessedness. Attaining her means attaining that, just as for Catholics partaking of the consecrated bread and wine means partaking of Christ.

Similarly, as the *Donna Pietosa* was the providential agency which called Dante from rebellion against God back into the path of obedience which leads to earthly blessedness, so she becomes a real symbol of that earthly blessedness. Desire of her fatefully involved desire of that.

Again, if Beatrice so is heavenly blessedness—not as a mere figure of speech, but as a real symbol—her guidance is one with the guidance of theology—revelation as interpreted by the pope. As she herself says:

Ye have the Old and the New Testament,  
Also the Shepherd of the Church to guide:  
Let this suffice you unto your salvation.<sup>3</sup>

So, if the *Donna Pietosa* is, symbolically, earthly blessedness, her guidance is one with the guidance of philosophy—reason as interpreted by Aristotle. "Because," says Dante,<sup>4</sup> "all human activities require a single end, namely, the end of human life for which man is ordained so far as he is man, the master and artificer who shows us this end and devotes himself to it ought to be most of all obeyed and trusted; and this master is Aristotle . . . [his] school [of moral philosophy] at the present day holds the sceptre of the world in teaching everywhere, and their doctrine may almost be called 'Catholic opinion.' Thus it may be seen that Aristotle was the guide and conductor of the world to this goal"—earthly blessedness.

Thus by her fruits known and symbolized, the *Donna Pietosa* signifies Moral Philosophy, and her sphere of influence is the active life presided over by philosopher and emperor, as Beatrice, signifying Theology, has for her sphere of influence the contemplative life presided over by Scripture and pope.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *V.N.*, xlili, 15-17.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Purg.*, xxxi, 22-24.

<sup>3</sup> *Par.*, v, 76-78.

<sup>4</sup> *Conv.*, IV, vi, 63 ff. (transl. of W. W. Jackson).



contrary would exact the one thing presently needful for the final fulfilment of faith to her, by "indirections finding directions out." Humanly blind to that divine purpose, Dante hesitates, questions. Even as the angelic adviser in the *Vita Nuova*, Love "clad as a youth in whitest raiment," they in effect answer: "Ask not more than is expedient for thee."<sup>1</sup>

The love to which the Intelligences incite is of earth, "the only region within their power."<sup>2</sup> Its reward lies within the "active or civil life."<sup>3</sup> For as motor-Intelligences, they possess only the blessedness of the active life, and cannot confer a blessedness which they have not.

So in effect, they, agents of divine Providence, would correct Dante's *inordinate* desire of instant salvation by inspiring a love reconciling him with present duty. As they are the agents of God, the *Donna Pietosa* is their agent. Themselves, as Dante says,<sup>4</sup> "natured by love of the Holy Spirit," send to him a comforter to his earthly task, as the Holy Spirit itself, the Comforter, was sent to the apostles for theirs. So Dante is brought to "the loving practice of wisdom," "l'amoroso uso della Sapienza," to the

Virtue which giveth man felicity  
In his activity.<sup>5</sup>

So known by her fruits—"finis est principium omnium operabilium"<sup>6</sup>—his Second Love is fittingly hailed as "fairest and most noble daughter of the Emperor of the Universe . . . Philosophy."<sup>7</sup> By the figure she would be younger sister of Beatrice. Later, as we shall see, Dante draws analogy between his two loves and the sisters Martha and Mary.

This symbolical sisterhood of the two loves is further indicated by the parallelism of the two *canzoni* of praise, first of the *Vita Nuova* and secondly of the *Convivio*. But the *Convivio* also draws clear distinction. To possess the "hope of the blest,"<sup>8</sup> "la viva Beatrice beata," would be "for the human intellect," says Dante, "to find that full satisfaction, that perfect peace, which constitutes eternal blessedness. But such is for man only when he shall have become

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *V.N.*, xii.    <sup>2</sup> *Conv.*, II, ix, 30-48.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, v, 66-80.    <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, II, vi, 110.

<sup>5</sup> *Virtute . . . che fa l'uom felice*  
In sua operazione [*Conv. Canz.*, iii, 83-84].

<sup>6</sup> Aquinas, *Comm.*, II Cor., 12:3.

<sup>7</sup> *Conv.*, II, xvi, 100-103.

<sup>8</sup> *V.N.*, xix, 47.



as an angel in heaven."<sup>1</sup> The *Donna Pietosa*, on the other hand, offers indeed "pleasures of paradise," such that her lover finds satisfaction (*si contenta*), "but in other wise than contentment in Paradise, which is perpetual: and to man on earth such is not vouchsafed."<sup>2</sup> She represents perfection "up to the limit of capacity of the *human* essence."<sup>3</sup> And Dante's capacity was for God's purposes in the activity of prophetic song.

Book III having declared the virtue of the Second Love, Book IV shows how that virtue, descending into the lover, may exalt him to likeness. Whatever degree of nobility, *gentilezza*, is latent, God-given, in him may be actualized. In the measure of his grace he may receive the freedom of Eden, human perfection.

There is a higher earthly blessedness, communion with Beatrice in thought, contemplation of heavenly blessedness. That, however, Dante must postpone until his mission is fulfilled, as St. Bonaventura in the zeal of his "great offices ever postponed the left-hand care" of mystic contemplation.<sup>4</sup>

Again, there is a highest blessedness, not earthly—communion face to face with the glorified Beatrice. For that Dante must be "transhumanized," either through the purgation of death, or—as in the *Commedia* he actually represents—by the miracle of rapture.

Such I take to be the dialectic of the *Convivio*. Toward the end of Book IV, the argument is summed up impersonally in two allegories. In the first,<sup>5</sup> the Lord's judgment of Martha and Mary is declared to mean that the contemplative life is "best," although the active life is "good." In the second allegory, Marcia, by command of her first husband, Cato, leaves him for her second, Hortensius; then, her womanly task accomplished, asks as reward of her merit reacceptance by Cato. This means, says Dante, that the noble soul by God's will turns from contemplation of him to its earthly task, then, that accomplished, would return to its first loving contemplation. Substitute for Marcia Dante, for Cato Beatrice, Dante's First

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theolog.*, I-II, qu. iiii, a, 2: "Promittitur nobis a Deo beatitudo perfecta, quando erimus sicut angeli in coelo."

<sup>2</sup> *Conv.*, III, iv, 34-37.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, III, vi, 85-87.

<sup>4</sup> *Par.*, xii, 129. Cf. E. G. Gardner, *Dante and the Mystics*, London, 1913, pp. 255-56; but cf. *infra*, pp. 10, 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Conv.*, IV, xvii, 85 ff.

Love, and for Hortensius the *Donna Pietosa*, Dante's Second Love, and the analogy is perfect.

There is also in Book IV a third allegory, which would show the Second Love, if not ordered to God, "culpable"—thus justifying the judgment at the close of the episode of the *Donna Pietosa* in the *Vita Nuova*. This allegory of the Angel at the Tomb<sup>1</sup> repeats the moral of the episode of the Pilgrims in *Vita Nuova*, xli, as later interpreted in *Paradiso*, xxxi, 103–11. The three Marys, or the three sects of the philosophy of the active life, vainly seek Christ, *la somma Beatitudine*, in the tomb of this world. The Angel, or "appetite of the soul" for Wisdom, food which satisfies but never sates,<sup>2</sup> directs the seekers to where alone that Highest Blessedness is to be found on earth, namely, in Galilee. For "Galilee," meaning "whiteness," "a color more charged with material light than any other," says Dante, may properly signify Contemplation.

For the Marys to have remained at the tomb after the Angel's enlightenment would have been culpable. The risen Christ was not there. So for the Christian to cleave to the active life as if highest blessedness were to be found in it would be equally culpable. The contrary has been revealed to him. He is erring, therefore, not in darkness—like the virtuous pagan Virgil—but against the light. Ignorance of God is only privation of good, the judgment of limbo. Defection from God is election of evil, meriting the judgment of hell. Dante was called into the active life of this world for God's purposes. His confessed error was for a time to be seduced by "things present with their false pleasure,"<sup>3</sup> and to follow a worldly life, not for God's purposes, but for his own; or, symbolically speaking, to cleave to the *Donna Pietosa*, forgetting Beatrice. So Aquinas: "The perfection of man is that, despising things temporal, he cleave unto spiritual. . . . Imperfection is it to desire temporal goods, though ordered to God; but it is perversity to set in temporal goods the end."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Conv.*, IV, xxi, 134 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Par.*, II, 11–12:

. . . . pan degli angeli, del quale  
Vivesi qui, ma non sen vien satollo.

<sup>3</sup> *Purg.*, xxxi, 34–35.

<sup>4</sup> "Perfectio autem hominis est ut contemptis temporalibus, spiritualibus inhaereat. . . . Imperfactorum autem est quod temporalia bona desiderent, in ordine tamen ad Deum: perversorum autem est quod in temporalibus bonis finem constituent."—*S. T.*, I–II, qu. xcix, a, 6. This allegory also interprets retrospectively the episode in the *Vita*

In the *Divina Commedia* this progressive allegory of the two Loves is only dramatically clarified. Moved by the divine Love expressed through Beatrice in glory, Virgil—or Moral Philosophy unilluminated by Faith<sup>1</sup>—leads Dante up to the Earthly Paradise, freedom whereof is given by Matilda, opener of Dante's eyes to the faith by the pageant of the church. Matilda's reward, therefore, is earthly blessedness so far as attainable by Christian moral philosophy. She is the antitype of the Leah of Dante's dream,<sup>2</sup> who is explained as signifying "action." In other words, Matilda is simply the symbolic *Donna Pietosa*, given a "local habitation [in Eden] and a name."<sup>3</sup>

She leads him back to Beatrice, clothed in the symbolic attributes of the Christian contemplative life—the colors of the theological virtues and the crown of wisdom. She is thus the antitype of Rachel in the same dream.<sup>4</sup> But though absolved from his guilt of alienation from Beatrice, Dante may not yet satisfy his thirst for contemplation of her. The Seven Virtues themselves forbid, just as before the angelical Intelligences had done. "Too absorbedly," they cry, and turn away his eyes.<sup>5</sup> Beatrice herself explains why.<sup>6</sup> Like the Disciples, like St. Paul, Dante must abide yet awhile in the active life of this world. He must prophesy to men the wrongs of church and empire, that these may be set right. He must call men to salvation by declaring his vision. That done, the reward of his service shall be contemplation of her. So him, through his attendant guides,

*Nuova* of the *Donne dello Schermo*—simulacra of true love from whom Dante is providentially recalled to that. In other words, his successive experiences progressively illustrate one spiritual lesson.

<sup>1</sup> Quivi [in limbo] sto io con quei che le tre sante  
Virtù non si vestiro, e senza vizio  
Conobber l'altre, e seguir tutte quante.  
—*Purg.*, vi, 34–37.

<sup>2</sup> *Purg.*, xxvii, 94–108.

<sup>3</sup> Dante sees Leah under the planet Venus (*Purg.* xxvii, 94 ff.) under the influence of which he had been moved to love the *Donna Pietosa*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* The contention of some critics that Rachel's antitype is not Beatrice but St. Bernard is counter to Dante's custom of making his dreams in the *Purgatorio* symbolically anticipative of immediately following experience. Moreover, St. Bernard symbolizes passage from mediate to immediate vision of God. Dante is not competent for this until "transhumanized."

<sup>5</sup> *Purg.*, xxxii, 1–9. If the "sinistra cura" of *Par.*, xii, 129, means "temporal care," the turning here of Dante's eyes "to the left hand" may appropriately signify his turning to the active life at the bidding of all the virtues. Cf. again *Par.* x, 55–63.

<sup>6</sup> *Purg.*, xxxii, 100–105; xxxiii, 31 ff.; also *Par.*, xvii, 124–42.

the Seven Virtues, Beatrice comforts in the very words of Christ to his disciples:

Modicum, et non videbitis me,  
Et iterum, sorelle mie dilette,  
Modicum, et vos videbitis me.<sup>1</sup>

In identifying the *Donna Pietosa* with Matilda, I do not mean to say that at the time of her appearance in the *Vita Nuova* or even in the *Convivio* she would have responded to that name. I do not know whether she would have or not. Her development as a symbolic character was, I repeat again, by retrospective process. She may in the first place have been a real woman loved by Dante after Beatrice's death, and made the theme of his occasional verse. The retrospective interpretation of the *Vita Nuova* then at once justifies his love of her as "noble," and yet condemns it as "culpable." Resolution of the apparent contradiction lies, I think, in the logic of the *Vita Nuova* itself, but—as the dramatic plan of that work demanded—the truth is shown enigmatically, "quasi in sogno."<sup>2</sup> Next, the *Convivio*, more clearly shows the benign effects of the *Donna Pietosa's* influence, namely, his attainment through her agency of an earthly activity in accord with Wisdom. But the *Convivio*, though it implies, yet slurs the resolution of the dramatic conflict between her and Beatrice. Finally, in the *Divina Commedia* all strands of the argument, both dramatic and symbolic, are smoothly interwoven, their tangles untwisted. The *Donna Pietosa* becomes a God-given Comforter to his appointed activity in the world, Philosophy, peace-bringer to the "battle of his thoughts," soothing his sense of exile from his true Blessedness, Beatrice, by the realization given that this exile is but temporary and a needful "way of sighs," on which God has sent him forth, yet by which, his mission done, he shall return to God. But, on the other hand, to desire the *Donna Pietosa* inordinately, to make her the too great delight of his eyes, as in the *Vita Nuova*<sup>3</sup> he confesses to have done—was to make of her a "siren" seducing him from his true blessedness, Beatrice.<sup>4</sup> To follow worldly activities in a Godly spirit is man's bounden duty; to follow them in a worldly spirit—for their own sakes—is, as Aquinas said, "perversity." "Amicitia

<sup>1</sup> *Purg.*, xxxiii, 13-15.

<sup>2</sup> xxxviii, 1-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Conv.*, II, xlii, 27-29.

<sup>4</sup> *Purg.*, xxxi, 45.

hujus mundi, inimica . . . Dei."<sup>1</sup> Enmity with God is anticipation of hell. But by divine grace Dante was warned in time.

So low he fell that all expedients  
For his redemption were already vain  
Else than to show him the lost folk.<sup>2</sup>

Dante believed himself the object of a special providence. He believed that, like St. Paul, an "abundance of visions" guided him. These called him from the withdrawn life of contemplation to active service in the affairs of men, the "civil life." According to his capacity, he was given Martha's "good part," not Mary's "best part."<sup>3</sup> Though he might yearn toward Beatrice in heaven, he was bound on earth to service of the *Donna Pietosa*.

Actually, the "active life" into which he plunged shortly after Beatrice's death was that of politics. The reward of his labors was exile. That he felt his judges to be unjust would be no bar to his recognizing in the affliction itself the hand of Providence. On his own showing, the Jews were no less unjust in crucifying Christ for that they were at the same time carrying into effect the will of God.<sup>4</sup> Divine justification of his exile must lie in its warning of a more perilous and self-imposed exile of his soul from the higher *patria* of heaven. So Virgil warns him among the sons of Cain:

ye take the bait, so that the hook  
Of the old adversary draws you to him;  
And so availeth little curb or call.  
The heavens call unto you, and wheel around you,  
Displaying unto you their everlasting beauties;  
And your eyes yet but looketh unto earth.  
Hence doth he buffet you who seeth all things.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, betrayed in his weakness like St. Paul by the "angel of Satan," the *stimulus carnis*—or concupiscence, as Aquinas interprets<sup>6</sup>—Dante is also chastened into humility. Now the category of concupiscence in Dante's dramatic symbolism is represented, as shown above, by the *Donna Pietosa* in so far as Dante's desire of her

<sup>1</sup> James, 4:4.

<sup>2</sup> *Purg.*, xxx, 136-38.

<sup>3</sup> Vulgate: *optimam partem*.

<sup>4</sup> *Par.*, vii.

<sup>5</sup> *Purg.* xiv, 145-51.

<sup>6</sup> *Comm.*, II Cor. 12:3. Beset by the Evil One at the precise noon of his earthly day—"nel mezzo del cammin"—Dante may possibly have had in mind the "noon-devil," "*Daemonium meridianum*" (Ps. 91:6), theologically identified with the proneness to worldliness of middle life.

became inordinate. But just as the other and benignant aspect of the *Donna Pietosa* comes in the *Commedia* to be represented by Matilda, so this her malignant influence may well, as Signor Santi argues, be represented by the Medusa-like siren, *la Pietra*. In other words, the influence of the *Donna Pietosa* was equivocal—good or bad according to Dante's reaction upon it. Matilda and *la Pietra* may represent univocally the divergent potentialities of the influence of the ambiguous *Donna Pietosa*.<sup>1</sup>

Although, both literally and symbolically, Dante's desire of *la Pietra*—if indeed she is to be identified with the *pargoletta* of Beatrice's rebuke<sup>2</sup>—was admittedly culpable, it is still rigorously possible even here for him to maintain that the "moving cause" of his praise of her was "not passion, but virtue." Again, in the retrospect he sees how by divine grace his weakness was made strength; therefore, like St. Paul, he will glory in his weakness. "Libenter igitur gloriabor in infirmitatibus meis, ut inhabitet in me virtus Christi."<sup>3</sup> In other words, as before in the case of his Second Love, behind his will was the will of God.<sup>4</sup> Not his "passion," but the "virtue" of divine Love was the true "moving cause" of his conduct, itself needful to bring him to contrition. He must experience subjectively that "hell" which he objectifies in the great confession of his poem. Thanks to his *inordinate* desire of her, *la Pietra*, he says,

robs me of that  
Whereof I have most thirst.<sup>5</sup>

Later enlightenment has shown him that his truly greatest thirst is for Wisdom. Unconsciously, therefore, he had declared that his inordinate love had robbed him of that. And so again he had spoken prophetically when he had said, "For her I boil in the hot caldron."<sup>6</sup> For the soul which has lost Wisdom is in danger of hell-fire. And in a consistent continuation of the *Convivio* Dante might have moralized these passages of his *canzone* on the text of Job: "Si deceptum est

<sup>1</sup> By analogous process differentiation of the category of Reason into Reason unilluminated by Revelation, and illumined, is symbolized by Virgil and Matilda, respectively, Dogmatic and Mystic Theology by Beatrice and St. Bernard.

<sup>2</sup> *Purg.*, xxxi, 59.

<sup>3</sup> II Cor. 12:9.

<sup>4</sup> *Par.*, v, 7-12.

<sup>5</sup> Quello, ond'io ho più gola. m'invola  
—*Così nel mio parlar*, II. 80-81.

<sup>6</sup> per lei nel caldo borro.  
—*Ibid.*, l. 60.

cor meum super muliere. . . . Ignis est usque ad perditionem devorans. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

In fact, humbled in spirit, having paid his penitential scot of tears,<sup>2</sup> he is brought back to his true blessedness, to Beatrice. His temporary experience of "hell" had been the only way, as she said. Consolation of his exile is given him. Not ungrateful Florence, but the world is his country,<sup>3</sup> yet only as a "threshing-floor" where he may aid in God's task of separating the chaff from the corn.<sup>4</sup> His ultimate mood is in effect one with that expressed by Hugh of St. Victor in the *Didascalicon*.<sup>5</sup>

All the world is a place of exile to philosophers. It is a great beginning of virtue for the mind to learn by degrees, by exercise, first to change these visible and transitory things, that afterwards it may be able also to relinquish them. He is yet delicate to whom his native land is sweet. But he is already strong to whom every soil is his country, and he is perfect to whom the whole world is a place of exile. The first has fixed his love on the world, the second has scattered it, the last has quenched it.

Dante fixing his love on the *Donna Pietosa* inordinately, or upon *la Pietra* inordinately, is the real exile from his true *patria*, having lost his way among "these visible and transitory things"—

present things

With their false pleasure turned aside my steps.<sup>6</sup>

Yet exile for a while he must be, serving his time as God's laborer, overseen by his Second—rather, secondary—Love, that Moral Philosophy which may reward him with earthly blessedness, promissory itself of the wages of his true mistress, his First Love and Last, Beatrice, dispenser of the heavenly blessedness which is eternal.

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<sup>1</sup> 31:9, 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Purg.*, xxx, 144-45.

<sup>3</sup> "Nos autem cui mundus est patria . . . ."—*De Vulg. Eloq.*, i,6.

<sup>4</sup> *Par.*, xxi, 151.

<sup>5</sup> iii, 20. I quote Gardner's translation—*Dante and the Mystics*, London, 1913, p. 150.

<sup>6</sup> *Purg.*, xxxi, 34-35.